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## In Search of Lost Cultures: Books 1987

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# In Search of Lost Cultures:

Books 1987

Shaun O'Connell

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Among the works discussed in this essay:

- The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, by Allan Bloom. 392 pages. Simon and Schuster. \$18.95.
- The Red White and Blue*, by John Gregory Dunne. 475 pages. Simon and Schuster. \$18.95.
- The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: An American Saga*, by Doris Kearns Goodwin. 932 pages. Simon and Schuster. \$22.95.
- Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, by E.D. Hirsch, Jr. 251 pages. Houghton Mifflin Company. \$16.95.
- The Man Who Owned Vermont*, by Bret Lott. 220 pages. Viking-Penguin. \$16.95.
- The Enigma of Arrival*, by V. S. Naipaul. 354 pages. Alfred A. Knopf. \$17.95.
- The Thanatos Syndrome*, by Walker Percy. 372 pages. Farrar Straus Giroux. \$17.95.
- The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections*, by Richard Poirier. 244 pages. Random House. \$19.95.
- The Counterlife*, by Philip Roth. 324 pages. Farrar Straus Giroux. \$17.95.
- Reagan's America: Innocents at Home*, by Garry Wills. 472 pages. Doubleday & Company. \$19.95.
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The spring of 1987—the period of Ronald Reagan's seeming decline and fall—was an eerie time to ready Garry Wills's *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home*, a book about the president's political ascent. While the effects of the Tower Commission Report were being felt and joint congressional hearings into the Iran-Contra scandal were continuing, past and present blurred in Wills's pages. His Reagan is a man buoyed by self-confidence, charm, and simple missionary zeal. Never strong on details, analysis, or operations, this Reagan was always willing to accept the direction of others, in Hollywood and in politics. Rather than a lone hero—his image as host of the television series "Death Valley Days"—Reagan was a willing front man, a spokesman, an image: for General Electric, for Republicanism, above all for the power of positive and patriotic thinking. "Morning in America" was his aptly upbeat campaign slogan in 1984.

For Wills, it seemed that Reagan characteristically turned away from darkness and bad news, often dropping associates who caused him trouble. For example, when he was gov-

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ernor of California and the presence of a group of homosexuals who had been appointed to his staff threatened to cause a scandal, Reagan claimed he was shocked to learn that they were there. When I turned from Wills's book to recent press accounts, I was told that Reagan was similarly shocked to learn from the Tower Commission that Lt. Col. Oliver L. North's covert activities had occurred under his nose, within his own National Security Council. He was also amazed when, through the congressional hearings, he learned of Admiral Poindexter's initiative in diverting profits to the Contras in Nicaragua which had been derived from the sale of U.S. arms to Iran. Reagan took no personal responsibility for any of these actions. Both in Wills's pages and in the daily papers, Ronald Reagan was either deceived or deceiving, manipulated or naive, bumbling or sly. An image, a national icon, was transformed into an enigma.<sup>1</sup> Reading Wills's study through this season of national self-consciousness was like listening to a hollow, ominous echo in a well; reflections and sounds resonated and blurred while we stared down at our own watery reflections against a cloudy, inverted sky.

When the public congressional hearings concluded in August, Sen. Daniel K. Inouye, chairman of the Senate Select Committee that had investigated the scandal, described the Iran-Contra scheme as "a chilling story, a story of deceit and duplicity and the arrogant disregard of the rule of law . . . [a story] of a flawed policy kept alive by a secret White House junta." Sen. Warren Rudman agreed with a colleague who said, "We cannot promote democracy abroad by undermining it at home."<sup>2</sup> In the year in which the two-hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Constitution was celebrated, many Americans were, as their president asserts he was, shocked to hear of secret juntas and democracy under siege. Something had been lost: a national consensus, a trust, a polity, perhaps a culture.

Paradoxically, Wills sees Reagan as a personification of American cultural values. A once-born man who apparently lacks inner conflict, his Reagan is "the great American synecdoche, not only a part of our past but a large part of our multiple pasts."<sup>3</sup> Ronald Reagan, of course, has acted many parts: athlete, frontiersman, warrior, advocate of the common man. Wills shows how much these were *roles* that Reagan played, just like the role that gave him his start in show business in 1936—recreating baseball broadcasts in Des Moines. Of course, Reagan played simplified, idealized figures in Hollywood. The story of George Gipp was first printed by Grantland Rice, serving as a useful fiction to motivate Knute Rockne's players at Notre Dame, before Reagan solidified his film career with the same material. Reagan's various parts were acts that developed the upbeat persona of Ronald Reagan. "The Reagan of the sports column and commentaries, of the dramatic baseball 're-creations,' is the President who is so good at giving pep talks to the whole nation."<sup>4</sup>

Wills dramatizes the blur between the man who Ronald Reagan was and the myths he absorbed in his childhood, acted in Hollywood, and advocated in politics. Reagan asserts that his childhood was "one of those rare Huck Finn–Tom Sawyer idylls."<sup>5</sup> (He seems unaware of Huck's haunted side and Tom's callousness, and would be shocked to learn that *Huckleberry Finn* is considered by many to be an anti-idyll.) However, Wills shows that the president's childhood was less romantic and more mundane than he would have us believe. A dutiful and obedient son, Reagan followed his mother's fundamentalist Church of Christ faith to Eureka College; an imitative son, he even learned from his father, who was a minor New Deal official under Harry Hopkins, that the welfare state was beneficial. Later Reagan would find "govment" the enemy, but in Hollywood, he played Treasury agent Brass Bancroft in a series of films. "Reagan worked on the screen for one gov-

ernment bureau, just as his father and brother had worked for other bureaus in Illinois. In the 1930s, whatever their earlier or later differences, all the Reagan men were G-men.”<sup>6</sup> While Reagan often celebrated the myth of the Western hero, Wills points out that in the real West settlers wanted and needed the government protection that these legendary heroes scorned. Repeatedly, Wills peels away strips of mythic makeup and challenges Americans to examine their habitual, willing suspension of disbelief when contemplating Ronald Reagan.

Reagan, by the roles given him—as the voice of midwestern baseball, as the best friend of the star, as the plain-spoken hero of horse epics—was also repeating an American instinct to claim a simplicity his circumstances belie, to remain with the innocent at home even as he escaped his home. With [Mark] Twain, the pretense was artful, highly conscious, used for cultural satire. With Reagan, the perfection of the pretense lies in the fact that he does not know he is pretending. He believes the individualist myths that help him play his communal role. He is the sincerest claimant to a heritage that never existed, a perfect blend of an authentic America he grew up in and of that America’s own fable about its past. Americans’ early days are spent playing cowboys and Indians—as Huck Finn’s days were spent enacting Tom Sawyer’s adventure-book fantasies. Fake Huck-Finnery is the real American boyhood, one that Reagan never had to give up. And now, through him, neither do we.<sup>7</sup>

In the spring of 1987, fake Huck-Finnery became, briefly, “Olliemanía.” Cropped haircuts and gap-toothed grins were momentarily modish. Boyish, brave, righteous, in command of patriotic rhetoric and with a voice that quavered with sincerity, Colonel North seemed nothing less than a young Ronald Reagan as he had appeared in films made during World War II, when he was a captain in the air force. After World War II, Reagan acted the part of a pilot in several films, though he never flew; indeed, for decades Reagan had a fear of flying. In fact, he never really left his true home, Hollywood. His alter ego, Colonel North, was celebrated for his courage.<sup>8</sup> Colonel North had been a decorated soldier in Vietnam before he became a covert operator and a propagandist for the Contra cause; Ronald Reagan had been an announcer, an actor who made propaganda films, and a salesman of many products before he became governor, then a president who declared himself a “Contra.” Film and television heroes made America’s day and haunted its nights.

Reagan’s America, for Wills, is a Disneyland in which myth and reality are indistinguishable, where we cannot tell the dancer from the dance, the act from the actor. Reagan is “the ideal past, the successful present, the hopeful future all in one. He is convincing because he has ‘been there’—been almost everywhere in our modern American culture—yet he ‘has no past’ in the sinister sense. He is guilelessly guiltless.”<sup>9</sup> The Tower Commission Report revealed a detached president, and the congressional inquiries revealed government operations that were secret not only from the public, but also from the Congress and, as he claimed, even from the president. All of this shook not only Ronald Reagan’s credibility, but also our sense of who we are and where we live.

“Those who wanted a Reagan as fierce in deed as in words had to pin their hopes on covert actions.”<sup>10</sup> So argues Garry Wills in this study, which successfully places Ronald Reagan in a number of enlightening contexts as he made his way to the top, and which anticipates his shadowy role in the Iran-Contra scandal. Conservatives have argued that the president’s men should let Reagan be Reagan, but Wills suggests that Reagan is Reagan when he talks more than he acts, when he removes himself from awareness of his



own covert activities, when he recedes into reassuring myths.

Doris Kearns Goodwin's *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: An American Saga* is a more laudatory and less analytical portrayal of the family background and early rise of another Irish-American president. Thorough and well researched, the book draws upon interviews and previously unexamined documents that were made available to the author by the Kennedy family.

Goodwin has been charged by some with whitewashing the Kennedys.<sup>11</sup> Though the book occasionally makes a judgment on the Kennedy desire for prestige and power, it is largely a sympathetic celebration, recounting a familiar American saga of three generations of Fitzgeralds and Kennedys as they rose from humble, immigrant origins to triumph in John Fitzgerald Kennedy's ascension to the presidency. However, Goodwin's study is driven by no sustained *critical* vision, contrary to Garry Wills's *The Kennedy Imprisonment* (1982), in which the Kennedys are portrayed as prisoners of an image of their own contriving and a debilitating lust for power.<sup>12</sup> Goodwin's study is strongest at a lesser level, in its anecdotal material, as when she elicits from Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, who has gone through so much loss, the endearing and revealing confession that her "greatest regret is not having gone to Wellesley College."<sup>13</sup> Here Goodwin catches the poignant desire for the social acceptance and respectability that only a Seven Sisters college could have conferred upon Rose Fitzgerald, among the children of Boston's Irish immigrants. Yet an Irish-American, parochial desire to maintain cultural identity kept her out of Wellesley College, for Archbishop William O'Connell successfully brought pressure upon Mayor Fitzgerald to have his daughter attend the Academy of the Sacred Heart.

Goodwin's John F. Kennedy, unlike Wills's Reagan, emerges from a richly detailed world of Irish-American culture, overlaid by the finest schools and best social connections his father's ambition and money could buy. This combination of ethnic identity and the dream of a success that would surpass that identity lay deep in his family history. As a boy, John Fitzgerald—later he would become Honey Fitz, the mayor of Boston, then the grandfather of the president—left his North End ghetto to hawk newspapers in downtown Boston, at the corner of Park and Beacon streets, in front of Bulfinch's golden-domed State House. There he saw the "other Boston" of wealth and culture.

For the child of the slum, this was a glimpse of happy privilege at the highest pitch—a glimpse which remained printed on John Fitzgerald's memory in such a way that forty years later he was able to recreate for his daughter Rose both the sights and sounds of Boston society as he first encountered it on Beacon Hill.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, it might be said that this shimmer of Ascendancy privilege became the grail for which the two families strove. John Fitzgerald, still a newsboy, would, according to his daughter, even be invited by an Irish servant into 31 Beacon Street, to warm up on a cold day; there he saw the heart of what would matter to him, the gracious home of Henry Cabot Lodge, who would become his political enemy. When he was shown the children's opulent playroom, young Fitzgerald perceived an epiphany of his mission. "I stood in the doorway and made a promise to myself that someday, when I had children of my own, I would be in a position to give them all the toys that these children of privilege had enjoyed."<sup>15</sup> So, as in a parable, it came to pass through succeeding generations that no Fitzgerald or Kennedy would lack toys.

Joseph Kennedy, who experienced a similar epiphany, would want more than toys for his children. At Harvard (1908–12), he watched while "Gold Coasters" on Mt. Auburn

Street turned, laughing, into Claverly Hall, leaving him outside, melancholy and separate, reminiscent of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby, who was shut out of a world of wealth and beauty, and left staring wistfully at a green light across a bay. Joseph Kennedy did not make Porcellian Club, an emblem of the world of privilege into which he could not pass. He vowed to do all he could to ensure that few clubs would refuse his sons.<sup>16</sup>

Wills's Ronald Reagan also reminds us of Gatsby, who had, in Fitzgerald's words, "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness," a faith in his own capacities for transformation. However, unlike Gatsby, Reagan always followed others' scripts for his many mythic roles.<sup>17</sup> He left behind his father's world of Irish Catholicism and, in time, Democratic politics. He headed west, where Hollywood held the promise of fulfillment through the portrayal of heroic lives on the silver screen. Goodwin's John F. Kennedy is the product of a far more coherent cultural heritage, combining the Irish and Brahmin traditions of his families' Boston base. However, Joseph Kennedy also went to Hollywood, where he invested in films and had an affair with Gloria Swanson. In fact, he was there in 1929 when his own father, Patrick Joseph Kennedy, died. Joseph Kennedy's choice to stay in Hollywood with Gloria Swanson, rather than return for the funeral, elicits a rare judgment from Goodwin.

It was a haunting choice, reminiscent of the one James Tyrone, Jr., makes in Eugene O'Neill's *Moon for the Misbegotten* when he wrongs his dying mother and then wrongs her again a thousand times over by entertaining a prostitute in his drawing room while escorting her body home on the train.<sup>18</sup>

Hollywood emblemized for the Kennedys what it had for Reagan. It symbolized for them how far they had come, how much they had transcended their origins. Wills accuses the Kennedys of "fake Hollywood glamour," a quality well known to Ronald Reagan.<sup>19</sup> The Kennedys would continue to find toys to play with and opportunities to pursue in Hollywood. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., recalls the attraction both John and Robert Kennedy felt toward Marilyn Monroe at the president's birthday party. "Bobby and I," wrote Schlesinger, "engaged in mock competition for her; she was most agreeable to him and pleasant to me—but then she receded into her own glittering mist."<sup>20</sup> Though Goodwin's John F. Kennedy is a far more rooted man than Wills's Reagan (indeed than Wills's Kennedy), each has made his own separate peace with his cultural heritage and each has been drawn into the glittering mist of Hollywood myths. "Hollywood works at sustaining the illusion that a world totally altered in its technology need not touch or challenge basic beliefs," says Wills.<sup>21</sup> John F. Kennedy anticipated Ronald Reagan in exploiting Hollywood connections for political purposes. Hollywood and those who were shaped by it sustained what literally can be called the dream of American life.

During the spring and summer of 1987, others looked beyond politics to discover a wider crisis in American culture. Allan Bloom, in *The Closing of the American Mind*, and E.D. Hirsch, Jr., in *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, complained that America—increasingly shaped by Hollywood, television, and radio—suffers from cultural impoverishment. "More and more of our young people don't know things we used to assume they knew," writes Hirsch.<sup>22</sup> Bloom sees American youth betrayed by their parents and their schools to a valueless world in which they are exploited by the junk culture, particularly rock music. For a teenager watching rock performers on MTV, "life is made into a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy."<sup>23</sup> Both Hirsch and Bloom detect Rousseau-inspired permissiveness at the center of the American cultural



crisis. In the name of self-development, we have forsaken our cultural heritage and have abandoned our children to a world of mindless sensationalism. Both studies show a continuing recoil from the various doctrines of liberation proclaimed in the 1960s. Bloom, who is far more often anecdotal in his approach, painfully remembers Cornell University in 1969, when radical blacks intimidated professors, who fawned "over what was nothing better than a rabble."<sup>24</sup> The rabble, he implies, have broken through the gates and have captured the citadel of culture.

Bloom's study is based upon the assumption, stated by Saul Bellow in his Introduction, that "we live in a thought-world, and the thinking has gone very bad indeed."<sup>25</sup> Bloom singles out the university, ruled by shifting public opinion and no longer the defender of standards, for blame. We have sacrificed the ideal of a unified culture to an empty relativism, thereby destroying the social contract, he argues. His book has won the endorsement of Ronald Reagan, Secretary of Education William J. Bennett, and Boston University president John Silber. It has become a surprising best-seller, for Bloom touches a nerve in passionate testimony that something has gone wrong in America's life of the mind. Yet he indicts the present with an idealized, mythic past, a time when students thought high thoughts, inspired by universities assured in their cultural message; such is Bloom's dream vision of a past in which America was one.<sup>26</sup>

Bloom impressively invokes Socrates, Plato, Machiavelli, Rousseau, and Kant to amplify his arguments, but he is less convincing when he resorts to personal experience to describe contemporary America. For example, he holds that the reason young people do not say "I love you" is that they are honest, but he never explains how he knows either what it is they say or their motives for saying it. "'Relationships,' not love affairs, are what they have," he insists, but he offers nothing beyond his own assertions and impressionistic observations to support this contention. Often the evidence he does offer is weak or trivial. For instance, he bases his argument that students have lost the sense of romance upon the example of a student whom he heard mock the idea of playing the guitar under a girl's window.<sup>27</sup>

Such examples and allusions serve to prop some startling arguments. Bloom, for example, decries value relativism even to the point of admiring Ronald Reagan's suggestion that the Soviet Union is "the evil empire."<sup>28</sup> That is, he advocates a renewed commitment to notions of good and evil, which would simplify, if not clarify, human and political relations. While it may be true, as Bloom argues, that "value relativism, if it is true and it is believed in, takes one into very dark regions of the soul and very dangerous political experiments," it seems also true that his admiration for old-fashioned prejudices—"prejudices, strong prejudices, are visions about the way things are"<sup>29</sup>—along with his denunciation of personal liberties derived from feminism, Affirmative Action, and other so-called misguided theories of equity—might as easily plunge us into dark regions of the soul and dangerous political experiments.<sup>30</sup> In his Preface, Bloom claims, "I no more want to be Jeremiah than Polyanna. More than anything else, this book is to be taken as a report from the front."<sup>31</sup> However, his work is nothing less than a jeremiad, a rhetorical weapon in what his imagery ("the front") reveals to be a warfare against a tidal wave of permissiveness fostered by rock musicians, value relativists, advocates of open curriculum, civil rights activists, lax parents, and others. He does all of this with the fervor, if not the divine sanctions, of a fundamentalist preacher, stirring passion and doubt with his words.

Bloom, rightly disgusted with the decline in cultural literacy in American life, repudiates contemporary America and waxes nostalgic for the dear, dead fifties, when, he im-

plies, students, teachers, and common readers were united in their devotion to Great Books. Certainly those of us who teach are frustrated by competing claims upon students' attentions, claims that result in a sometimes amazing cultural ignorance among them. We understand the conditions that occasion laments like those issued in these books by Bloom and Hirsch. However, that seems little reason to convert the time of one's youth, as does Bloom here, into a sentimental myth of felicity. There is much to be said for his argument that we, as a society, are united only in our belief in relativism. "The insatiable appetite for freedom to live as one pleases thrives" on this belief.<sup>32</sup> Yet there is more to be said for faith in relativism. In literary studies it is often celebrated as "negative capability," a tolerance for ambiguity and a range of opinions, a refusal to rush to judgment. Also, given the condition of blacks, minorities, and women in the 1950s, given the atmosphere of social conformity and sexual repression then, given the political paternalism and subterfuge of the Eisenhower years; given all that, there is more to be said than Bloom allows for in the desire for freedom that has marked our time. Still, Allan Bloom wisely asks us to count the cultural costs.

Hirsch's study is characterized by tonal restraint and careful construction of argument. Few would debate his assumption that "cultural literacy is the oxygen of social intercourse" or his argument that "we cannot assume that young people today know things that were known in the past by almost every young person in the culture."<sup>33</sup> The complaints about Hirsch's study have centered around an appendix titled "What Literate Americans Know: A Preliminary List."<sup>34</sup> Some have been annoyed that this list of names, places, and events was accompanied by no explanations. The reader is told that he should be aware of

scab (labor)  
Scandinavia  
Scarlet Letter, The (title)  
scarlet woman

and so on, but is given no glosses that might help him out of the depths of cultural illiteracy.<sup>35</sup> George Steiner raises another question in his *New Yorker* review, where he found that the list represented "a peculiarly graphic image of the American liberal imagination—of the national mythologies of common sense—at a certain point in our history."<sup>36</sup> Orestes and Dickens are included, but not Electra and Thackeray; Emily Dickinson is there but Ezra Pound is omitted; Verdi is in, Wagner is out.<sup>37</sup> The difficulty in not supplying explanatory notes or coming up with a coherent list unintentionally illustrates the problem Hirsch addresses in his text: the absence of cultural polity in America and the inability of scholars to agree on the terms in which to address it.

It is not a truth universally acknowledged that the cultural crisis perceived by Bloom and Hirsch exists or, if it does, what responsibilities literature has to address it. Steiner, for example, takes exception to Hirsch's desire to spread cultural literacy as a means of survival in the modern world, because he does not find survival in the modern world—"a fairly hellish place"—to be "an unquestionable ideal."<sup>38</sup> In *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections*, Richard Poirier questions the powers and responsibilities of literature to address the problem of culture. "Literature is a very restricted passage into life, if it is one at all. . . . Literature is so variable a factor in any situation that it is absurd to suppose that it is some sort of thing waiting neutrally to arbitrate real or imagined cultural crises."<sup>39</sup> Yet both Steiner's pessimism about the modern world and Poirier's sense of literature's limitations might be seen as further illustration of a cultural crisis in which literature and American life are increasingly detached.



Most of the fiction that I read during this season provided a very restricted passage into life. Indeed, there has been much recent complaint about the state of the art of fiction. Many critics agree that current fiction is far too detached from contemporary life. In an article titled "The Fiction We Deserve," Carol Iannone fingers "minimalism" as the problem: that is, fiction written after the fashion of Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, and others, in which we find drab, stripped prose descriptions of depressing, constricted lives. "There now seems to be a consensus on the existence of a problem in contemporary fiction," concludes Iannone.<sup>40</sup> Alfred Kazin described the problem differently in his Phi Beta Kappa Address before the Harvard commencement this past June. He complained of a "great sourness and introversion" in contemporary American letters.

The literary world is full of itself, bemused by language as theme as well as instrument . . . conscious of its separation not only from the world of power but from intelligence as power.<sup>41</sup>

Instead of self-referentiality and art that is about the process of making art, Kazin looks for what Emerson sought in his Phi Beta Kappa Address 150 years earlier: an example of the "writer as thinker, thinking about anything he cares to think about, the writer as speculative intelligence and public critic, the writer making his point by the passion of his rhythms."<sup>42</sup> Kazin justly sets high standards, by whose measure most contemporary fiction fails. Yet some fiction, as we will see, fails by trying too hard to engage the world of thought and action. One work, however, V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*,<sup>43</sup> beautifully fulfills its own intentions and meets at least this critic's great expectations for what Henry James called "the great form."<sup>44</sup>

The one minimalist novel I read, *The Man Who Owned Vermont*—a first novel by Bret Lott—was a qualified success. Its epigraph is taken from Psalm 39, on the way sorrow grows worse when one remains "dumb and silent," a condition that describes most of Lott's characters. This downscale novel concerns Rich Wheeler, an RC Cola salesman in Northampton, Massachusetts, and his estranged wife, Paige. It is Carver-like in its portrayal of withered life situations, and is written in an image-starved, plain style. A gray pall hovers over its characters. Wheeler, who is alone for much of the novel, often watching television and eating junk food, is depressed in his prole underworld, at the edge of the consumer culture, lonely, yearning, desperate to encounter a clarifying epiphany.

Rich and Paige live in a time and place of diminishing possibilities. Rich cannot, for example, afford to buy a house for his wife.

We'd never be able to afford a house, at least not one like those we wished we could have, especially not the one at the top of the hill in Whately, the house we'd finally agreed we both could live in. I couldn't give her that.<sup>45</sup>

Vermont represents an ideal land of his dreams, while Massachusetts embodies all that is sour and all too real. His resentment makes him cruel to Paige, contributing to her miscarriage. While they are separated, he travels to the Quabbin Reservoir with a divorced woman, Rose, and her son, Jason. Rich wonders at the town, Enfield, which had been abandoned, then flooded in 1938 to make the reservoir. Rose: "I felt like I lived down there the last year of my marriage. Like I lived underwater."<sup>46</sup>

Yet Rich will not allow himself to settle to the bottom. Through some courageous introspection and some telling, brief encounters with others, he grows able to confront his guilty memories and admit his need for his wife; through a series of revealing actions, particularly a vivid deer-hunting scene, he breaks away from his minimalist life and goes

after his wife with passionate intensity. “Now I knew what to do. I’d walked the Quabbin, lived there in those dead towns. Now I’d surfaced for air.”<sup>47</sup> So too does Bret Lott, in this novel that fights its way out of the smothering, underwater world of literary minimalism.

In what might be called an example of literary maximalism, John Gregory Dunne overloads the circuits of his novel, *The Red White and Blue*, which is about nothing less than one man’s involvement in the major political events of the last twenty years in American life.<sup>48</sup> The territory traversed by the hero—a rich writer named Jack Broderick—is vast, spanning the criminal justice system, Vietnam, Hollywood, Mexican farmers, California grape growers, politics within the Catholic Church, the presidency, the radical political movements of the 1960s, Las Vegas hustlers, prison life, decadent Europeans, and more. Dunne told an interviewer that he wished to “use all the journalism I’ve done since we moved to California in 1964.”<sup>49</sup>

Dunne’s novel also uses as reference points some of the best American political fiction: Jack Broderick recalls Jack Burden of Robert Penn Warren’s *All the King’s Men*: both are self-ironic yet secretly romantic narrators who are eventually drawn into what they observe. Dunne’s novel also echoes Edwin O’Connor’s *All in the Family*, for each portrays a vulgar, selfish, Irish-American founding father who grooms his children for political greatness but then lives to see his family shattered. (Dunne and O’Connor, of course, reach back to the Kennedy family saga for their inspiration.) In addition to all this, Dunne attempts to represent the class range and conflicts among Irish-Americans by including from their group a president of the United States, several millionaires, and a Vietnam veteran who is crazed by political ambition. Clearly this is a case in which less would have meant more.

Jack Broderick, narrator and dangling man, explains the “gawk effect,” which occurs when motorists slow to see the results of an accident. “I wanted to gawk at an accident of history.”<sup>50</sup> So too, apparently, does Dunne, who seems to stuff all of his journalistic notes and travel descriptions into this overweight novel. *The Red White and Blue* is itself something of an accident that invites gawking; it forces us to contemplate the perils of high speeds and heavy loads, for Americans, in or out of their cars, and for works of fiction.

The “we” in Dunne’s remark includes Joan Didion, his wife, noted for her own highly wrought, intensely self-aware novels of political consciousness. (When they work together, Didion and Dunne write films—the remake of a *A Star Is Born*, for example.) Dunne includes some of Didion’s interest in aesthetic self-reflection in his novel, explaining why his narrative cannot be sequential.

This is the eternal problem of the first person narrator, he who in the first line would tell you that this is the saddest story he has ever heard. The knowledge of what happened is an almost intolerable burden for the narrator.<sup>51</sup>

Such self-regarding broodings add more refraction to this already too-many-sided novel. That is, Dunne not only includes too much journalism, he also includes evidence of the “introversion” about which Kazin complained. A novel seemingly about recent American history actually turns out to be about the wonder of its own making.

Of the works discussed here, the one that best illustrates the problems surrounding excessive self-consciousness is Philip Roth’s *The Counterlife*, a self-consuming artifact, a self-conscious metafiction, a novel that disappears into itself. For all that, *The Counterlife* opens in compellingly traditional fictional terms, focusing upon a man in crisis, Henry Zuckerman; at forty, a weary dentist, he will risk quintuple bypass surgery so that he can continue his infidelity with his dental assistant, Wendy. Then, lured into compassion, we



suddenly learn that his terminal tragedy was recreated by Nathan Zuckerman—the writer and alter ego who has served Philip Roth badly in several novels—in a narrative written before his brother’s funeral. That is, we discover that we are not reading about a life but about a narrator’s fictional reconstruction of that life, as told by Philip Roth. To Nathan and, it seems, to Roth, all is art, and death is only a way to end narrative options.

Yes, his sessions with Wendy had been Henry’s art; his dental office, after hours, his atelier; and his impotence, thought Zuckerman, like an artist’s artistic life drying up for good.<sup>52</sup>

While such an analogy brings honor both to common life and the art that portrays it, Roth is never content to let his creation remain fixed, in the midst of life.

Roth’s triumph over death is to prolong the art of fiction by proliferating possibilities in his characters’ lives. Later in the novel, we discover that Henry has *not* died; instead, he has gone to Israel to join a radical Zionist sect! Then Roth plays turn and counter-turn to illustrate the truism that has guided him away from his beginnings as a gifted fictional social satirist.

Life is and: the accidental and the immutable, the elusive and the graspable, the bizarre and the predictable, the actual and the potential, all the multiplying realities, entangled, overlapping, colliding, conjoined—plus the multiplying illusions!<sup>53</sup>

It is amazing that Philip Roth, along with other fabulists like William H. Gass and Donald Barthelme, thinks that this truism—all the world’s a stage and life is but a dream, etc.—needs such constant reiteration. Clearly the world is less interesting to Roth than the fictional games he imagines he can play with it.

In another fictional fabrication, Nathan is hijacked on his way back from Israel to England, then, confusingly, arrives safely; finally, though we have long ceased to care, it is Nathan who dies and Henry who reflects upon *his* brother’s misguided life. In a witty touch reminiscent of John Barth, one of the characters gets weary of all this artifice and quits her role, though Woody Allen has more fun with similar material in his film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, where an actor, tired of his repetitious role, leaves the screen to enter the world. *Counterlife*, on the other hand, loses force and seriousness as it turns away from the beautifully articulated pains of Henry Zuckerman, another Ivan Illych, into a seminar illustration of metafictional values and techniques.

Walker Percy’s *The Thanatos Syndrome* fails out of more noble intentions.<sup>54</sup> It is driven by a missionary zeal: an example of the novel as warning tract. In this novel, Percy revives for reconsideration Tom More, hero of *Love in the Ruins* (1971), a novel in which Percy described the end of the world in 1983. That novel had its lighthearted side, but now, as Percy explains, “Dr. More comes up against some very serious business indeed: the real danger of technological hubris. Although I hope it has its funny moments, the book has a certain anger to it.”<sup>55</sup> That anger, sustained by his moral outrage and considerable intelligence, makes his novel worth attending, but it finally turns the work into a sermon, something more or less than an achieved novel.

In Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, More discovers that chemical manipulation (heavy sodium in the water supply) has tranquilized the population into a pallid happiness. More, a disciple of Freud and Harry Stack Sullivan, is disturbed because he believes that each patient has within him his own cure; as Jung did, he believes that each person has to make friends with his own terror, not narcotize himself into numbness. More had spent two



years in prison for selling amphetamines to truckers, and during his incarceration he had time to reflect upon the bloody tide of history.

I was reading a new history of the Battle of Somme, a battle which, with the concurrent Battle of Verdun, seemed to me to be events marking the beginning of a new age, an age not yet named. In the course of these two battles, two million young men were killed toward no discernible end. As Dr. Freud might have said, the age of thanatos had begun.<sup>56</sup>

Such powerful rhetoric compels respect, though Percy, it seems, loses interest in the detail work of fiction making, for he allows his plot to slide into contrived and melodramatic confrontations that strain credulity; he even includes much stock footage of car and boat chases. All of which is in the service of illustrating Percy's passionate convictions about the importance of sustaining human dignity, but he neglects to persuade us that his characters are sufficiently realized to warrant our belief. Where Roth is finally obsessed by fictional contortions, Percy preaches a latter-day sermon about final things. Each novelist loses interest in character and situations of personal crisis, the basis of all achieved fiction.

The most accomplished and culturally aware work of the season was V. S. Naipaul's novel in the form of a memoir, *The Enigma of Arrival*, a work which insists that we provide a proper literary context before we judge it but which also transcends literary games. Naipaul offers us nothing less than visions and revisions of what Seamus Heaney has called "Englands of the Mind."<sup>57</sup> That is, Naipaul's evocative meditation posits a place of the imagination, shaped by centuries of celebratory poets who have created cumulative images of England, a shimmering vision of culture.

Naipaul's narrator carried these images, like a passport, when he arrived, from Trinidad, a scholarship boy bound for Oxford, in 1950. Shakespeare's England, "this little world, / This precious stone set in the silver sea," beckoned.<sup>58</sup> In time, these visions of a heavenly city—Naipaul's version of Thomas Hardy's Christminster, in *Jude the Obscure*—fade, then they are renewed, modified, and amplified when, two decades later, his novel's narrator and central consciousness comes to live in a country cottage near Stonehenge and Salisbury.

Naipaul's *Enigma* reminds me, first, of some reflections on the wonders of England by Henry James. Naipaul's prose, like James's, hovers, swoops, pounces, and picks apart; then it lifts in proud flight. When James arrived in London in 1876, he "took possession of it."<sup>59</sup> The city throbbed with literary implication. "London's neighborhoods speak to me," he said, "only with the voice, the thousand voices, of Dickens."<sup>60</sup> So, too, does Naipaul's narrator, in 1950, find his literary Crystal Palace in London. "The London I knew or imaginatively possessed was the London I had got from Dickens. It was Dickens—and his illustrators—who gave me the illusion of knowing the city."<sup>61</sup> Even a year later, after the first rush of Dickensian imagery had worn off, James was writing, to his friends back home, "My interest in London is chiefly that of an observer in a place where there is most in the world to observe."<sup>62</sup> Naipaul's narrator, too, is a Jamesian observer, living a celibate, artist's life, ever attentive to the tones of city sites and rural landscape, the hints of character revelations by those Englishmen who pass his steady gaze in the middle distance.

Naipaul and James are representative artists of their centuries, young men from the provinces, England's former colonies, where English blank verse and baroque prose

stirred lust in the hearts of some young men on the make. Oh, to be in England, now that culture is there! Naipaul's narrator—this former Trinidad lad from an Indian family, whose bovine icons had been most available on condensed-milk cans—was drawn to the wet meadows of Waldenshaw in part because he was enthralled by reproductions of Constable paintings, works that were soaked in pastoral grace; a place, in art and life, emblemized by calm cattle, pictured wading in tranquil waters in the inviolate English countryside.

Joseph Conrad also comes to mind, to provide another context of understanding for *Enigma*, as his *Heart of Darkness* had already served as a model for Naipaul's African novel, *A Bend in the River* (1979). The languid, reflective opening of *Heart of Darkness* finds Marlow floating aboard his boat, on the Thames, with London men of power and influence. He imagines those earlier Englishmen who sailed from London to the ends of the earth, bearing "the dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires." Then, in a striking reversal of imagery, Marlow imagines that time, before there was a London, when England was "the very end of the world" for Roman conquerors. A young Roman soldier who approached England would have then faced fascinating, detestable enigmas. England would have been his fearful encounter with the unknown, just as Africa would become the heart of darkest mystery for nineteenth-century Europeans.<sup>63</sup>

Though England has long been transformed by centuries of civilization, Naipaul's innocent abroad approaches London like that Roman soldier, or like Marlow moving up the Congo in quest of Kurtz, full of fearful fascination for the place that had first stirred his imagination. Like Conrad, another young man from the cultural provinces, Naipaul comes to celebrate British culture, but also, with his outsider's eye, to measure its decline, particularly its loss of the Victorian work ethic. Perhaps it takes outlanders like James, Conrad, and Naipaul to best appreciate the pure exalted *idea* of England at the same time that they can discern the course of its cultural decline and fall. These colonials, on their quests for culture, find the heart of darkness in England.

*The Enigma of Arrival* is a meditative novel about seeing the *place* where Naipaul chose to live, England; about seeing through his original romantic conceptions of what he wished it to be; about seeing into the proper names of local people, places, and things; finally, about seeing what all this *means*. Twenty years after arriving from Trinidad, Naipaul's persona enters the placid but indistinct landscape of the rain-smeared lands around Salisbury.

Later—when the land had more meaning, when it had absorbed more of my life than the tropical street where I had grown up—I was able to think of the flat wet fields with the ditches as "water meadows" or "wet meadows," and the low smooth hills in the background, beyond the river, as "downs." But just then, after the rain, all that I saw—though I had been living in England for twenty years—were flat fields and a narrow river.<sup>64</sup>

What he comes to learn, in his adjusted and corrected visions, constitutes the matter of Naipaul's *Enigma* variations. First impressions of the British heartland prove as misleading as his first impressions of London had been two decades before. Sheep shearing seems a "ceremony, . . . like something out of an old novel, perhaps by Hardy," and a farmer's cottage and grounds, "Jack's cottage," seem remnants of ancient peasant lives.<sup>65</sup> "So much of this I saw with the literary eye, or with the aid of literature."<sup>66</sup> *Enigma* is, then, a work that both acknowledges and modifies literary precedent.

However, Naipaul comes to learn that Jack is not a fixed figure in an artful design, but



a man, like all men, in flux. "Everything was aging; everything was being renewed or discarded."<sup>67</sup> At nearby Amesbury, where the British army placed its firing ranges in Naipaul's day, Guinevere had gone to a nunnery, after the dissolution of Camelot. Five hundred years before Amesbury was founded, in A.D. 979, the Romans left Britain; Stonehenge had been built and had fallen into ruins long before the Romans came. "So history here, where there were so many ruins and restorations, seemed to be plateaus of light, with intervening troughs of disappearances into darkness."<sup>68</sup>

All things pass. Jack's garden grows wild, then Jack dies. Naipaul's perambulating meditator, walking the valley that once had been a riverbed, recomposing its shape and significance in his mind, decides that Jack was not only a saving remnant of peasant days and ways; he was more: an artist of the near-at-hand.

He had created his own life, his own world, almost his own continent. . . . Jack had disregarded the tenuousness of his hold on the land, just as, not seeing what others saw, he had created a garden on the edge of a swamp and a ruined farmyard; he had responded to and found glory in the seasons.<sup>69</sup>

Facing his own sere season, Naipaul's narrator takes heart and hope from the example of Jack's brave art.

A large dairy is built, then fails. Young couples come and go, compromised by infidelity or boredom. Naipaul's narrator stays, watches, mulls implications. In time, his estate cottage yields his "second childhood of seeing and learning, my second life, so far away from my first."<sup>70</sup> There, in the lush and placid valley, Naipaul's alter ego arrives at the heart of the matter, recovers his literary voice, finds his elected home.

All of which sounds far more autobiographical than fictional, for Naipaul draws heavily upon memories of his own experiences. Like his narrator, he too came from Trinidad, bound for Oxford, in 1950. He too became a writer and, in time, came to live in a stone cottage on a derelict Edwardian estate near Salisbury. Further, for all his careful observation of scene and character, particularly of his distant and mysterious "landlord," Naipaul dramatizes a central consciousness, the fine impressions of the writer-narrator, so it would be natural to assume that *Enigma* is only a slightly disguised autobiography, another in a series of distinguished books in which Naipaul, in his own willfully refined Oxbridge voice, meditates upon alien cultures.

However, *Enigma* is every bit as much a novel as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; in fact, Naipaul has artfully composed his portrait of an aging artist who, in the midst of life, has lost his way in London, who then finds himself and his new life in a perfect pastoral landscape. He walks on lands, in brief possession, which his landlord owned:

The view from the back of the manor, the view through which I walked, was of a nature almost unchanged since Constable's day: a view without a house, without the peasant or river activity of the Middle Ages or the age before the plowing of the downs, a view almost of a natural park.<sup>71</sup>

Nothing better marks *Enigma* as a novel, as it does Joyce's *Portrait*, than its resonant language. However, the way Naipaul organizes his material around a controlling vision also reveals his artist's shaping hand.

Reflections upon Jack and his garden, which dominate the first third of the novel, are balanced by reflections upon the landlord and his estate in the final third. It is in the resolutions of this apparently artfully contrived contrast of caste and class that Naipaul re-



solves his thematic dialectics. As he had sympathy with Jack's efforts as a folk artist, so too can his persona identify with the landlord, himself a minor writer, and share his love of place: "the many-featured fantasy of manor, manor village around its green, manor garden."<sup>72</sup> Though Naipaul's narrator is charmed by gestures of welcome from this reclusive landlord—who sends him poems by Krishna and Shiva, the products of the landlord's "Indian romance"—he realizes that a world of empire and "privilege lay between us. But I had an intimation that it worked against him."<sup>73</sup> Naipaul's narrator is now prepared to recognize the point of his long journey. As he had come to learn that Jack was more than the simple peasant he seemed to be, so too does Naipaul's hero realize that his landlord is far less than the Big House lord he appeared to be. Naipaul's hero knows he has to *act* to survive, while the landlord, surrounded by his estate, does not: "this privilege could press him down into himself, into non-doing and nullity."<sup>74</sup> Finally, this brings *Enigma's* meditator to a resolving realization:

I lived not with the idea of decay—that idea I quickly shed—so much as with the idea of change. I lived with the idea of change, of flux, and learned, profoundly, not to grieve for it. I learned to dismiss this easy cause of so much human grief. Decay implied an ideal, a perfection in the past. But would I have cared to be in my cottage while the sixteen gardeners worked? When every growing plant aroused anxiety, every failure pain or criticism? Wasn't the place now, for me, at its peak? Finding myself where I was, I thought—after this journey that had begun so long before—that I was blessed.<sup>75</sup>

*Enigma*, then, is a parable of possession, in which a former colonial finds himself in command of empire's symbolic seat of power.

V. S. Naipaul, like Henry James and Joseph Conrad before him, has been both celebrated and castigated for his stance as a self-elected defender of British culture. In his Caribbean novel, *Guerrillas* (1975), for example, a local revolutionary writes, "It is very black outside," in his "emerging" nation; "in England you don't know how black night can be here." He cannot understand why he will die there, in futile fight, so far from the lights of London. "I was born here, this is not London, it's like a bad dream, but I know I'm not waking."<sup>76</sup> *Enigma*, too, strikes that note of celebration for England's lights, but the book also registers the full resonance of its darker reverberations.

Naipaul's hero comes from the bad dream of former outposts of Empire to the heart of the matter, which is England. He, it seems, is the last believer in an idea of culture which had long ruled the waves and much of the world. The England he finally discovers has suffered a failure of will and imagination.

The very kind of people who, in the great days of the manor, would have given of their best as carpenters, masons, bricklayers, might have had ideas of beauty and workmanship and looked for acknowledgement of their skill and craft and pains, people of this very sort now, sensing an absence of authority, an organization in decay, seemed to be animated by an opposite instinct: to hasten decay, to loot, to reduce to junk. And it was possible to understand how an ancient Roman factory-villa in this province of Britain could suddenly, after two or three centuries, simply with a letting-go by authority, and not with the disappearance of a working population, crumble into ruin, the secrets of its buildings and its modest technologies, for so long so ordinary, lost.<sup>77</sup>

Yet, he realizes, it is precisely because England has relaxed its old high ways of rule that Naipaul finds himself there—Oxford man, author—as an occupant of a stone house on the edge of a grand manor. In its dying fall, England has allowed him entry not only to the

Christminster that Hardy's Jude never attended but also to the symbolic center of Empire, the English garden and the manor house, "the great invention" of the English according to James.<sup>78</sup> Naipaul, too, measures its greatness, but also finds his voice in its falling off.

"I never saw so great a thing with so much littleness in it," wrote Alexander Pope of Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire.<sup>79</sup> Naipaul sees little need for Pope's bitterness, for he records the last days of Empire, shrunken to a disintegrating country estate that symbolizes the decline of a great culture. Death is his mighty theme. Yet language—resonant, evocative language—is his elegiac mode, his way to fix the flux of passing things, his tribute to the idea of a noble notion of civilization which he finds fading in the English fog. *The Enigma of Arrival* is, then, an act of cultural preservation.

Men need history; it helps them to have an idea of who they are. But history, like sanctity, can reside in the heart; it is enough that there is something there.<sup>80</sup>

Culture, its loss and tenuous preservation, was the thread that ran through some of the books I read during the politically tense and dangerous seasons of 1987. 🐾

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## Notes

1. In *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, Michael Paul Rogin discusses the intentional blur between fact and fantasy which surrounds Ronald Reagan. Rogin describes an incident from the 1984 Republican Convention which reverses the imagery of Orwell's *1984*. For Reagan, "media men deliberately dissolved the boundary between life and image to offer us the reassurance of film. The president reelected in 1984 does not promote the telescreen as an instrument of surveillance and personal invasion on which big brother is watching you. Instead he offers freedom from public and private anxieties by allowing you to watch big brother. When Nancy Reagan spoke at the convention, following the film of her life, Ronald Reagan watched her on television from their hotel suite. 'Make it one more for the Gipper,' she urged, and the mass television audience (including him) saw her tiny figure turn with arms raised in support of an enormous image on the screen behind her, larger than her and larger than life. On camera in the hotel room, the image watched itself wave back, forming the truncated head and shoulders of her husband, the president of the United States." Michael Paul Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1987), 42.
2. Cited in Adam Pertman, "Hearings End; Panelists Divide on the Lessons," *Boston Globe*, 4 Aug. 1987, 1.
3. Garry Wills, *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1987), 1.
4. *Ibid.*, 123.
5. *Ibid.*, 7.
6. *Ibid.*, 77.
7. *Ibid.*, 94.
8. *U.S. News & World Report* published a special issue on Colonel North which examined, among other matters, how " 'Olliemania' Hits the U.S." There the editors say that Oliver North surpassed Ronald Reagan as a "true American hero," which is what Reagan had called North. "In a very real sense, North eclipsed Ronald Reagan and did so on the medium that gave the President his greatest influence—television. In his bravura performance, North not only became the nation's latest existential hero, he took over Reagan's role as the Great Communicator." Editors of *U.S. News & World Report*, *The Story of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North* (Washington, D.C., 1987), 31. See too, *Taking the Stand: The Testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver L. North* (New York: Pocket Books, 1987).
9. *Ibid.*, 387.

10. Ibid., 354.
11. Most vividly, Kenneth S. Lynn, "Letting the Chips Fall?" *Commentary* (June 1987): 68–72.
12. Garry Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1982).
13. Cited in Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: An American Saga* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 144.
14. Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, 44.
15. Cited in *ibid.*, 56–57.
16. Ibid., 210–15.
17. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 2.
18. Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, 411–12.
19. Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, 196.
20. Cited in *ibid.*, 141.
21. Ibid., 148.
22. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), 5.
23. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 75.
24. Ibid., 313.
25. Saul Bellow, Introduction to *The Closing of the American Mind*, 17.
26. Ezra Bowen, "Are Student Heads Full of Emptiness?" *Time* (17 August 1987): 56–57.
27. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 124–35.
28. Ibid., 141.
29. Ibid., 43.
30. Ibid., 150–51.
31. Ibid., 22.
32. Ibid., 28.
33. Ibid., 19, 8.
34. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph Kett, and James Trefil, "What Literate Americans Know: A Preliminary List," *Cultural Literacy*, 146–215.
35. Ibid., 202.
36. George Steiner, "Little-Read Schoolhouse," *New Yorker* (1 June 1987): 108.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 109.
39. Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1987), 5.
40. Carol Iannone, "The Fiction We Deserve," *Commentary* (June 1987): 60.
41. Cited in Richard Higgins, "Scholar Deplores 'Introversion' in Literary World," *Boston Globe*, 10 June 1987, 28.
42. Ibid.



43. V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).
44. Henry James, "A Letter to the Deerfield Summer School," in Leon Edel, ed., *The Future of the Novel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 29.
45. Bret Lott, *The Man Who Owned Vermont* (New York: Viking-Penguin, 1987), 66.
46. *Ibid.*, 152.
47. *Ibid.*, 218.
48. John Gregory Dunne, *The Red White and Blue* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).
49. Cited in Leslie Garis, "Didion & Dunne: The Rewards of a Literary Marriage," *New York Times Magazine*, 8 Feb. 1987, 18.
50. Dunne, *The Red White and Blue*, 278–79.
51. *Ibid.*, 147–48.
52. Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1987), 35.
53. *Ibid.*, 306.
54. Walker Percy, *The Thanatos Syndrome* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1987).
55. Cited in Kim Heron, "Technological Hubris," *New York Times Book Review*, 5 April 1987, 22.
56. Percy, *The Thanatos Syndrome*, 86.
57. Seamus Heaney, "Englands of the Mind," *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968–1978* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1980), 150–69.
58. William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, act 2, sc. 1, lines 45–46, in George Lyman Kittredge, ed., *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1936).
59. Cited in Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Conquest of London: 1870–1881* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1962), 271.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Naipaul, *Enigma*, 133.
62. Henry James, in a letter to Grace Norton, 9 August 1877, in Leon Edel, ed., *Henry James Letters, Vol. II, 1875–1883* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 135.
63. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971), 3–6.
64. Naipaul, *Enigma*, 5.
65. *Ibid.*, 13.
66. *Ibid.*, 18.
67. *Ibid.*, 32.
68. *Ibid.*, 50.
69. *Ibid.*, 93.
70. *Ibid.*, 87.
71. *Ibid.*, 204.
72. *Ibid.*, 196.
73. *Ibid.*, 192.
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Ibid.*, 210.
76. V. S. Naipaul, *Guerrillas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 222.

77. Naipaul, *Enigma*, 325.

78. Henry James, cited in Margaret Drabble, *A Writer's Britain* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 135.

79. Alexander Pope, cited in Drabble, 115.

80. Naipaul, *Enigma*, 353.